

# The 3 Levels of Samadhi

By [Roger Gabriel \(Raghavanand\)](#)



In his illuminating text, *The Yoga Sutras*, the sage [Patanjali](#) introduces a systematic path to regain Higher Consciousness. This has since been called *Raja Yoga* or the Royal Path, a journey of techniques and lifestyle guidelines to awaken the mind to its true Self. Within the text, Patanjali provides a concentrated set of instructions known as the [Eight Limbs of Yoga](#), culminating in a state of freedom, liberation, ecstasy, and enlightenment—[Samadhi](#), the realization of all your spiritual practices.

## Meditative Absorption

Patanjali explains that *Samadhi* is a state of meditative absorption, attained by the practice of *Dharana* (focused attention) and *Dhyana* (effortless meditation) when the True Essential Nature is known, without the distortion of the mind. It can be thought of as the culmination of your meditation process. *Samadhi* is the mind in its most concentrated state and can be compared to normal thought as a laser beam can be compared to normal light. The awareness of the meditator, process of meditation, and the object of your meditation have all merged into one. From knowledge, you have become knowingness. The mind in *Samadhi* possesses power that a normal mind does not, making it the main tool the Yogi uses to achieve the end goal of yoga—the joining of the individual self with the Universal Absolute.

## Be Deserving

The *Vedas* tell you that everything in the Universe has awareness. Rocks, plants, animals, and humans all have awareness to a greater or lesser degree. The *Vedas* also state that only humans have the potential for [self-awareness](#). Dogs, for example, don't ask, "Who am I?" This means that every human being has the potential to become fully self-aware and reach the state of *Samadhi*. However, practice alone does not guarantee *Samadhi*. The *Guru Gita* says *Moksha mulam, guroh kripa*—the root of liberation is the Guru's Grace. Grace of the Divine or its representative, an enlightened guru, is also required. To reach *Samadhi*, you have to deserve it.

*Samadhi* is beyond the normal mind and intellect, which makes describing it somewhat difficult; it can only be fully appreciated by direct experience.

While reaching *Samadhi* will be a major spiritual achievement for you, *Samadhi* also has several levels of refinement through which you may ascend.

## **Level 1: *Savikalpa Samadhi***

This first level of *Samadhi* has within it four different stages. The beginning stages of *Savikalpa Samadhi* are where, during meditation, you transcend all mental activity. Patanjali says that, for a short period of time, you lose all human consciousness. In this state, the concepts of time and space are altogether different. For a minute, an hour, or more you are in another world. Now you see that practically everything happens spontaneously—you have nothing to do. Thoughts and ideas do not affect you. You remain undisturbed, and your inner being functions in a dynamic and confident manner.

However, this is not yet a permanent state and everybody has to return to ordinary consciousness. As you begin to integrate this undisturbed state of silence along with the disturbed states of waking, dreaming and sleeping, Patanjali describes the four stages of *Savikalpa Samadhi* that are possible.

### **Stage 1. *Sarvitarka Samadhi*:**

Here the mind totally focuses on the gross aspect of a physical object. This is described as “examination” or learning the “inner secrets” of the object. In this stage, every aspect of the object is understood and you gain full knowledge of the physical object.

### **Stage 2. *Savichara Samadhi*:**

Now the mind moves beyond the outer layers of the object and the subtle aspects of objects (*tanmatras*) are contemplated or “discerned.” The abstract qualities such as redness, beauty, love or the sound, texture, form, flavor, etc. of the object begin to be understood.

### **Stage 3. *Sa-ananda Samadhi*:**

Here the mind is devoid of the objective world, you move beyond the intellect. There is no reasoning or reflection, just the tranquility of the settled mind. The *sattvic* (pure) mind is only aware of its own joy. The focus is on the inner powers of perception and within the mind itself. It’s known as a “blissful” *Samadhi* filled with joyful peace.

### **Stage 4. *Sa-Asmita Samadhi*:**

Now even the bliss has gone and you are just here. Only the *satvic* (pure) [ego](#), the I-ness remains, the I AM. Simple awareness of individuality—you are here and aware of nothing else. This is the ego-sense in its elemental form. No fear, no desire. This *Samadhi* can be likened to what is known in the Shankara Tradition as [Cosmic Consciousness](#). The mind becomes fully Awake, it is a state of witnessing of the material world and you become aware of the Divinity (Bliss) within yourself.

In *Savikalpa Samadhi*, the *samskaras* (latent tendencies or past impressions which condition your life and desires) have not been dissolved. They still remain in seed form. The Great Indian Saint, Ramana Maharshi, described *Savikalpa Samadhi* as “holding on to reality with effort.” In this *Samadhi*, the concentrated mind can begin to access some of the “lesser” yogic powers (*Siddhis*).

However, because the ego is still present, you must be careful how you choose to use these powers. If you use them with a pure motive, you can greatly serve humanity and will progress on your spiritual journey with humility. If you choose to use them for personal greed and ambition, you may cause harm and stall your spiritual progress.



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## Level 2: *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*

*Nirvikalpa Samadhi* is a higher state of awareness where the ego and *samskaras* have been dissolved and only Consciousness remains.

Patanjali says the material world has become like a shadow from which you are completely free. In *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* there is no mind as you know it—there is only infinite peace and bliss. Here nature's dance stops, and the knower and the known become one. Here you enjoy a supremely divine, all-pervading, self-amorous ecstasy. You become the object of enjoyment, the enjoyer, and the enjoyment itself.

Now the heart is fully Awake. In *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, the first thing you feel is that your heart is larger than the universe itself. The universe appears as a tiny dot inside your vast heart. Here, there is infinite bliss and infinite power. You not only feel bliss, but actually become bliss.

This *Samadhi* is similar to the Divine Consciousness described in the Shankara Tradition, a state of deep love for the world and everything in it, recognizing the Divinity in everything. It is entering a celestial realm. You experience *Ritambhara Pragya*, where your thoughts spontaneously manifest into reality. The past and future are blended into the eternal present. Everything is now. Everything is here. Time and space have been transcended. The exulted blissful state may last for a few hours or a few days. Initially there is no wish to return from this state and it is said that if one stays at this level for 21 days, there is every possibility that the soul will leave the body for good. However, through continued practice, you are able to come down from *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* and immediately function normally in the world.

Both *Savikalpa* and *Nirvikalpa Samadhis* are considered temporary states in that you can only fully experience them by withdrawing from normal life. Even the Great Enlightened Yogis close their eyes to meditate. However, the Yogi's "normal" life is not as most people experience it. A Yogi is living a life fully supported by the Unbounded Field of Infinite Possibilities. Imagine the whole of manifest creation is touching the front of your body and the unmanifest, Pure Awareness is touching your back. You lean forward and you are in the localized world but the non-local is fully there, supporting your every breath. To quote Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, "It's living 200 percent of life."

## Level 3: *Dharmamegha Samadhi*

An even higher level of *Samadhi* is *Dharmamegha* or the "Cloud of Virtue" *Samadhi*.

Patanjali says that this level arises when you have lost even the desire to know God or to be Enlightened. This *Samadhi* cannot be gained by effort, it reveals itself when all effort has dissolved. It is a Divine Gift, beyond notions of Absolute and relative.

When even the temptations of the Yogic Powers cause no distraction, it is said that Pure Knowledge showers down like a Cloud of Virtue, bringing liberation and the Bliss of the Divine.

This is *Jivanmukta*—liberation while still in a physical body. The afflictions of all karmas have been removed, the Yogi becomes ever free and shines in his or her own glory. It is said that in this state, the Yogi sees without eyes, tastes without tongue, hears without ears, smells without nose, and touches without skin. His/her mere intention can work miracles. The Yogi simply wills and everything comes into being.

## *Sahaja Samadhi*

Some contemporary saints such as Ramana Maharshi have also talked about *Sahaja Samadhi*.

This *Samadhi* could probably be placed between *Nirvikalpa* and *Dharmamega Samadhis*. It is where the inner silence is maintained along with normal daily activities. It is being able to maintain the experience of *Nirvakalpa Samadhi* at all times. Here you radiate Divine Illumination, the Divine is perfectly manifesting through you at every second. You are filled with Divine Grace. It can, perhaps, be likened to the Unity Consciousness of the Shankara Tradition.

With *Samadhi* as your goal, you should be regular with your spiritual practices, enjoy the blessings that each day brings, and know that everything will be revealed at the perfect moment.

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